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SUBJECT: BOMBING UPDATE

REF: ISTANBUL 1744

1.(SBU) Summary: The toll from yesterday's attacks in Istanbul now stands at 27 dead and 450 wounded. Among the dead are British Consul General Roger Short and 12 other Consulate employees (two British, ten Turkish). As in the November 15 blasts, most victims were Turks passing by the vicinity of the attacks. They included noted actor Kerem Yilmazer. To date, we have no reports of American casualties. The official Turkish investigation is at an early stage, while a large Scotland Yard contingent arrived in the city late last night. Consul General joined those meeting British Foreign Minister Jack Straw at Istanbul airport on the evening of November 20, and reiterated USG readiness to provide whatever assistance we can to our British colleagues. UK officials have accepted the offer of the former U.S. Consulate in Beyoglu as a base of operations for the Scotland Yard investigation, and Turkish officials have moved to close the streets around the location. End Summary.

2. (SBU) Updated casualty figures indicate that 27 people died in the two November 20 bombings: 17 at the British Consulate and 10 at the headquarters of HSBC. The vehicle targeting the Consulate succeeded in crashing through the compound's gates, and exploded inside the compound directly next to the buildings along the compound wall that housed temporary offices for the CG, Public Affairs, and Security officials. The structures were obliterated in the blast; the bodies of Consul General Roger Short and his secretary, Lisa Hallworth, were recovered hours later after tons of debris were removed. The fact that the vehicle penetrated the perimeter seems to account for the fact that while many injuries occurred among those passing by on the street and in the shops and offices surrounding the Consulate, there were relatively few fatalities.

3. (U) In Levent, at the site of the first bombing, reports indicate that 10 people lost their lives. Most were passers-by on the street, including noted actor Kerem Yilmazer, who was apparently driving by the building at the time of the explosion. The front of the HSBC building was sheered off by the blast and lower floors were largely gutted, but to date only two fatalities have been reported among those inside the building.

4. (SBU) We are working closely with our British colleagues to provide assistance, particularly on the security, administrative, and consular fronts. The Consul General joined the group greeting Foreign Secretary Straw at Istanbul airport and reiterated Ambassador Edelman's earlier offer to help in whatever way we can. GSO worked through the night of November 20-21 to ready the former American Consulate building for immediate occupancy, and British officials indicate that they will use it as their command post for the Scotland Yard team that will conduct its own investigation of the bombing. Turkish officials have already taken steps to seal off the streets surrounding the property.

5. (SBU) Meanwhile, life in Istanbul has resumed some of its normal rhythm, albeit with an underlying sense of shock and horror. Even more than last weekend's attacks, yesterday's explosions, which occurred on a busy thoroughfare in the upscale Levent business district and on a crowded corner in the heart of the shopping and cultural hub of Beyoglu, brought home to the entire city its vulnerability. Strangers and neighbors alike have taken the time to express their condolences not just to British expatriates, but others as well, expressing the wish "Gecmis olsun"-- may it pass. Prime Minister Erdogan encapsulated the feelings of most with his comment yesterday that "those who bloodied this holy day and massacred innocent people will account for it in both worlds. They will be damned until eternity."

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